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ABSTRACT

This analysis reveals critical weaknesses surrounding the theoretical basis for the AIR (American Institutes for Research) evaluation design. It poses questions concerning the evaluation methodology. Specifically, it identifies major discrepancies in the identification of the target population, the selection of comparable control groups, test instruments used in the study, the amount of time between pre and post testing, lack of consistency in programs being studied, adequacy of instructional staff, and the source of funds being used. The major issues discussed include: (1) identification of language groups, (2) comparability of treatment and comparison groups, (3) instrumentation, (4) pre and post testing, (5) variability of instructional treatment, (6) variability of teacher characteristics, and (7) costing of bilingual education. It is the opinion of IDRA that inadequacies in methodology, sampling, instrumentation, controls, and implementation make the AIR findings highly questionable. The information gathered by AIR is not entirely useless, however, since it is obvious that there are problems and discrepancies in the implementation of bilingual education programs. It is recommended that the U.S. Office of Education should diligently pursue further analysis into these problems, and channel federal resources toward their solution. (Author/AM)

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The AIR Evaluation of The Impact of ESEA Title VII Spanish/English Bilingual Education Programs: An IDRA Response

with a summary by

Dr. Jose A. Cardenas

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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SUMMARY

The U.S. Office of Education recently released interim findings of a study to determine the impact of bilingual education on students. The study, funded through the U.S. Office of Education, was conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) for the Office of Planning, Budgeting, and Evaluation.

A study of this type is rather unique in that it attempts to determine the effects of bilingual education, rather than identifying problems in the implementation of bilingual education programs. It is inconceivable that USOE would conduct a study to determine the effects of reading rather than a study of a specific methodology used in the teaching of reading. It is rather obvious that the difference in treatment is indicative of the USOE commitment to reading as a desirable social value and a lack of a similar USOE commitment to bilingual education.

Regardless of implications of this USOE lack of commitment to bilingual education, the report issued by USOE is based on a study which was poorly conceived and even more poorly implemented. However, the study findings were released to the public media, immediately raising serious questions about the value of bilingual education. Analysis of the study makes it evident that the only issues it can raise are (1) USOE's lack of commitment to bilingual education; (2) USOE's judgement in funding and publishing such a poorly designed and implemented study; and (3) USOE's inadequate supervision of its Title VII bilingual education programs.

An analysis of the AIR study conducted by Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) identifies major discrepancies in the identification of the target population, the selection of comparable control groups, test instruments used in the study, the amount of time between pre and post testing, lack of consistency in programs being studied, adequacy of instructional staff, and the source of funds being utilized.

Specifically, the following discrepancies were noted:

1. Language classifications were done subjectively by teachers in spite of a body of research which points to the unreliability of teacher judgement as an indicator of the language characteristics of students.

2. One-half of the teachers classifying students in the various language categories did not speak any language other than English.

3. The classification, "limited English-speaking ability," included only students who spoke no English whatsoever. Therefore, the AIR study does not analyze the performance of children of limited English-speaking ability, but rather the performance of children who are monolingual speakers of a language other than English.

4. Comparison groups used as a standard for comparing the performance of Title VII children were "nominated" by Title VII personnel. There is no evidence that the "nominating" process did produce comparable groups.

5. District Title VII personnel were allowed to nominate groups to be used for comparisons from classrooms outside of their own. Differences between school districts, such as, organization, teaching methodologies, teacher

training, teacher qualifications and competence, and varying financial resources were not controlled.

6. About one-third of the non Title VII teachers and aides were involved in a bilingual program. This raises the possibility that the comparison groups had "bilingual treatment," thus invalidating them as a comparison. Instead of concluding that students were not doing well in some aspects of the Title VII bilingual program, an alternative conclusion may have been reached that students do better in state or locally funded bilingual programs.

7. Eighteen out of the thirty-seven projects compared (almost 50%) were unable to identify a comparison site. Most of the projects which could not identify a comparison group were in large metropolitan or isolated rural areas. In making comparisons between groups, it is possible that these two significant segments of the sample were excluded.

8. Measures of English reading ability were obtained by the use of an English language achievement test given to Spanish monolingual children "just learning to read and write in English."

9. A very large number of children classified as Spanish monolingual did not take the various Reading subtests. AIR used total Reading scores in spite of missing subtest scores, thus unfairly lowering Reading scores for the entire sample.

10. Though in theory, the interim between pre and post testing could have been seven months, only six of the thirty-seven projects involved more than six months, and eighteen of the projects (almost 50%) were pre-post tested within a span of five months or less.

11. Using a definition based on the placement of students and not on the characteristics of the program itself, the study concludes that most bilingual programs are of the maintenance type. "Maintenance" is not defined.

12. Program characteristics varied considerably as to instructional time, content, and instructional methodologies. Impact findings did not control for such differences.

13. IDRA secondary analysis of the AIR data shows that only 26% of the teachers participating in the study reported having a bilingual teaching credential, which is the minimum criteria for adequate training determined by many states.

14. Though the study reports that 93.8% of the Title VII teachers had participated in bilingual inservice traning, the training could have been taken within a five-year span and could consist of as little as one day or less. IDRA analysis of the individualized project descriptions revealed that 6.6% of the teachers involved in the Title VII programs received no training whatsoever, and 7.4% received one-day or less. It is possible that as many as 46% of the teachers received less than 3 days of inservice training over a five-year span in the implementation of a new and drastically different instructional methodology.

    There is no indication of the extent or quality of such inservice.

15. Analysis of the study indicates that 49.6% (almost one-half) of the teachers in the Title VII bilingual programs admit to not being proficient in the other language!

    It is doubtful that USOE would give a second thought, let alone fund, a study of any program presented in the English language if one-half of the teachers did not speak English.

16. An analysis of the study indicates that a cost analysis was not performed, but rather a subjective response was collected from "cognizant local personnel." Conclusions reached did not consider bilingual Title VII funds versus other bilingual funds, developmental costs versus operational, and first year versus continuation program cost.

It is unfortunate and perhaps irresponsible for the U.S. Office of Education to release and give such wide dissemination to findings of such questionable validity just prior to the congressional deliberations on the refunding of the Bilingual Education Act.

The U.S. Office of Education should diligently pursue analysis of the problems identified in the study and channel its available resources into seeking and implementing solutions, rather than undermining bilingual education efforts through the dissemination of invalid findings.

June 1977
Dr. Jose A. Cardenas

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Office of Education recently released interim findings of a "study to determine the impact of bilingual education on students in the cognitive and affective domains in a nationally representative sample of Spanish/English bilingual projects funded through Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Act." An analysis of the report by the U.S. Office of Education reveals (1) critical weaknesses surrounding the theoretical basis on which the design is premised, and (2) serious questions concerning the evaluation methodology which is utilized. The issues and concerns which are raised in this response to the AIR study are so basic to the evaluation that they make any inferences about "bilingual program impact" at best meaningless and at worse grossly inaccurate and misleading.

The major issues focus around the following:

I. Identification of language groups
II. Comparability of treatment and comparison groups
III. Instrumentation
IV. Pre and post testing
V. Variability of instructional treatment
VI. Variability of teacher characteristics
VII. Costing of bilingual education

Each of the above is discussed separately.

I. IDENTIFICATION OF LANGUAGE GROUPS

A. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: The AIR study design uses four student language classifications: Spanish monlingual, Spanish dominant bilingual, English dominant bilingual, and English monolingual. Teachers were asked to assign students to one of the four language groups. The language categories were then used as the basis for instrument assignment and data analyses.

B. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES:

1) There is a body of research which points to unreliability of teacher judgement as a student language indicator.

2) The problem is compounded when a non-bilingual teacher is asked to classify the language proficiency of a student who speaks two languages. As measured by the AIR Teacher Bilinguality Scale, only 50.4% of Title VII teachers are proficient in both Spanish and English.

3) On such a basis, the assessment of student language proficiency becomes meaningless as do any analyses conducted on such categorizations.

4) IDRA takes issue with the operational definition of "limited English-speaking ability" (LESA) students. LESA students, as defined in the AIR study, included only those students who were classified as "Spanish monolinguals." If a student is

Spanish monolingual, he/she speaks one language. There is no provision in the AIR definition of LESA for a student who speaks two languages and is limited in one, i.e., English.

5) Since the LESA definition constricts the population being studied, it must similarly constrict the application of findings. The AIR study does not measure the performance of children of limited English-speaking ability, but rather the performance of children who are monolingual speakers of a language other than English.

II. COMPARABILITY OF TREATMENT AND COMPARISON GROUPS

A. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: A basic element of the AIR study involved "contrasting the performance of two groups of students: those enrolled in Title VII Spanish/English bilingual projects and comparable students not enrolled in such projects." The comparability of Title VII and non-Title groups becomes critical.

B. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES:

1) AIR asked Title VII personnel to "nominate" comparison classrooms which were comparable in terms of ethnicity, socio-economic status and grade level. As an empirical technique for identifying comparison groups, this procedure is highly questionable, particularly if the comparability of identified groups is not adquately analyzed on a post hoc basis.

2) There appear to be a number of confounding variables which limit any interpretation of Title VII/non-Title VII project differences. For example, the nominated comparison classrooms could be either within the same district as the Title VII project being studied or within a neighboring district. District variables affect particular classrooms and may have distorted homogeneity between the groups. There appears to be no provisions in the AIR study which attempt to account for any possible differences.

3) Differences in performance between the treatment (Title VII) and the control (non-Title VII) groups may be attributed to inherent differences between the groups, district resources, organization, teacher competency and an endless variety of other factors.

4) The AIR study reports that "one-third of the non-Title VII teachers and aides were involved in a bilingual program." The use of comparison groups where one-third of the instructional staff is involved in a non-Title VII bilingual program is highly questionable if findings are subsequently interpreted in terms of the success of bilingual education.

5) An additional concern involves the fact that eighteen out of thirty-seven projects (almost 50%) were unable to identify a comparison site. The AIR study states that most of the projects who could not identify a comparison group were sites which encompassed large metropolitan cities or isolated rural sites. This raises an important question. Were Title-VII/non-Title-VII comparisons made only on the basis of the remaining nineteen projects or were comparisons made on the basis of nineteen non-Title VII groups and thirty-seven Title VII groups? The first option would result in the exclusion of the large metropolitan and the isolated rural Title VII projects which

would make for severely limited interpretations. The second option would raise serious questions concerning any Title VII/non-Title VII group comparability.

6) It is possible that the use of non-Title VII bilingual programs as a comparison indicates that findings reflect that bilingual education students do better (or worse) in other federal, state or locally funded programs than in Title VII programs and does not measure the effects of bilingual education as commonly represented in the media.

III. INSTRUMENTATION

A. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: The AIR instrumentation plan included administration of the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS), Forms S and T. As a criterion for reading achievement, the CTBS Reading Test, Level C, was administered to those classified as Spanish monolingual.

B. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

1) The use of the CTBS as the measure of English reading ability is very questionable when the target group includes students who are Spanish monolingual or Spanish dominant bilingual. The inclusion of such scores, which are of questionable validity, in an analysis of Title VII impact, results in skewed test results.

2) The above statement is verified through careful analysis of the AIR section which deals with this issue. The study reports that the number of missing Reading Total scores for Spanish monolingual second grade students was "substantially larger than the number of missing Vocabulary subtest scores . . ." This was due to "CTB/McGraw-Hill's scoring rule of computing a skills area total score (like the Reading Total score) only if all the skills area subtests had been taken." A very large number of students did not complete all

the subtests in Reading. The report states that "the fact that these students were just learning to read and write English and that the initial stage of language learning usually involves the acquisition of vocabulary probably accounts for the larger number of Vocabulary scores that were present" (emphasis added).

3) AIR decided not to use the test publisher's scoring rules. Reading Total scores were computed on the basis of the number of correct items, even if some subtests had not been taken. The rationale for such a procedure was that (a) the subtests should have been taken since they were administered at the same test session; and (b) most of the students with missing subtests "were those judged to be Spanish monolingual." This rationale appears less than valid. While the AIR scoring procedure successfully reduced the amount of missing data, it also resulted in the inclusion of skewed scores which invalidate any subsequent statistical analysis of Title VII Reading Test data.

IV. PRE AND POST TESTING

AIR STUDY ELEMENT: The AIR study reports that "the testing sessions, lasting a total of approximately six hours, were conducted in the fall (around November) and spring (around May) of the 1975-1976 school year."

DISCUSSION OF ISSUES:

1) Testing dates actually ranged from November 4 to December 12, 1975 for the pre-test and April 6 to June 9, 1976 for the post-test. In theory, the maximum interim between pre- and post-testing could have been approximately seven months.
2) An analysis of Appendix III-C-2 of the AIR report, however, reveals that in actuality no individual project site testing was conducted with a seven month interval. Only six of the thirty-seven projects involved a 6 to 6½ month pre-post-test span.
3) Eighteen of the thirty-seven projects, almost 50%, were pre-tested within a span of five months or less. On such a basis, the validity of any change scores becomes highly questionable.

V. VARIABILITY OF INSTRUCTIONAL TREATMENT

A. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: The AIR report states that "most of the Title VII projects in their fourth or fifth year of funding were implementing a Spanish maintenance bilingual program."

B. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES:

1) Using a descriptor related, not to the program itself, but to the placement of students, AIR makes a highly general statement and asserts that most programs are maintenance bilingual.

2) No operational definition of a "maintenance program" is given.

3) An IDRA review of the Title VII project descriptions found in Volume II of the AIR report reveals great variability among projects.

4) The amount of instructional time devoted to the different curricular components varied greatly. One project offers 1½ hours per week in English oral language development; another offers 9 hours per week.

5) Variations in the time allotted to reading, culture, and mathematics were also found.

6) Implementation of instructional strategies across the 37 Title VII projects also varied greatly.

7) Given the variability of program characteristics, it is inaccurate to categorize all programs into one "maintenance" group and to analyze "program impact" without accounting for inter-program differences.

C. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: The AIR study concludes that "... there seems little doubt that most of the students in the Title VII projects included in this evaluation generally were not performing in the English language at expected grade levels."

D. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES:

1) Given the inadequacies of the AIR instrumentation and pre-post design which have already been discussed, the above statement lacks an empirical base and is highly questionable.

2) There is an additional concern with respect to this finding--the variability of the instructional treatment.

3) IDRA analysis of the project descriptions provided by AIR in Volume II of the report reveal a wide range of approaches and a wide range in the amount of time devoted to teaching English to Spanish-speaking students. One project devotes thirty minutes per day to oral language drills for beginning English speakers. The same project devotes equal time to instruction in oral Spanish for

English-dominant students.

4) The AIR study fails to analyze student language outcomes in terms of instructional treatment; rather, a variety of instructional approaches are grouped together as "the bilingual program."

VI. VARIABILITY OF TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS

A. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: The study reports that 80% of the teachers had a "regular or bilingual teaching credential."

B. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES:

1) A regular teaching credential is different from a bilingual teaching credential. It is extremely misleading to group the two categories into one, particularly when the object of study is bilingual education.

2) An analysis of Table V-B-1 reveals that 80.4% of the non-Title VII teachers also had a regular or a bilingual teaching credential, thus giving further evidence that this category provides misleading information.

3) IDRA conducted secondary analyses of the data presented in Volume II of the AIR report in which information is provided on a per project basis. One analysis reveals the following:

a. Of the 277 Title VII teachers who participated in the study, a total of 131, or 47%, reported having a regular teaching credential; and

b. Of the 277 Title VII teachers who participated in the study, a total of 64, or 23%, reported

having a bilingual teaching credential.

4) It, therefore, becomes necessary to question AIR's data analysis techniques and interpretations. The fact that only 23% of the Title VII teacher group held a bilingual credential was not utilized by AIR in its student impact study nor did AIR attempt to utilize a bilingual credential as an independent variable in assessing differential impact of Title VII programs.

5) On the other hand, it is dangerous to draw conclusions on the merits of a pedagogical treatment where only 23% of the teaching staff report having met the state minimum criteria for adequate training in the application of the treatment.

C. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: The AIR report indicates that 93.8% of the Title VII teachers had attended in-service or school district workshops in bilingual-bicultural education.

D. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES:

1) The above figure, as reported by AIR, encompasses a five-year span.

2) It is difficult to ascertain AIR's rationale for asking a teacher to report his/her attendance at a bilingual education inservice during a five year time frame. The procedure makes for highly

questionable results.

3) The procedure becomes even more questionable when one considers that the object of study--bilingual education--is a relatively new field with constantly evolving methodologies and techniques.

4) An additional concern involves the amount of such in-service, a variable which is not easily discerned from the AIR report.

5) IDRA's secondary analysis of the per project data resulted in the following breakdown concerning the amount of in-service.

6.8% of the 277 Title VII teachers participated in 1 day or less of in-service training;
35.7% participated in 2-15 days of training;
15.0% participated in 15-30 days of training;
20.5% participated in 30 or more days of training;
6.0% participated in no training;
4.0% gave no response.

6) AIR makes no attempt to include such differences in its impact study. As an analytic technique, the practice of grouping such a wide range of responses--from less than one day of in-service to 30 or more days--is conducive to data misinterpretation.

7) There is no indication of the extent or quality of such in-service.

E. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: As measured by the AIR scale of Teacher Bilinguality, "more of the Title VII teachers were bilingual than the non-Title VII teachers."

F. DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUES:

1) The AIR Bilinguality Scale was derived from six questions which deal with (1) usage of two languages at home, with respondents' children, with friends; and (2) reported proficiency in two languages as children, as teenagers, and as adults.

2) Given the state of the art in the measurement of bilingualism, it is extremely doubtful that the AIR scale should be used as a measure of teacher language proficiency.

3) Even assuming that the scale could be used as a rough indicator, there are some discrepancies in the reported data which point to its lack of validity. For example, 67% of the Title VII teachers report using both Spanish and English at home; 69% report using both languages with their children. Yet only 50.4% report that they are now proficient in both languages. Apparently, then, using Spanish or English at home and with children can mean anything from saying a few words to carrying on day-to-day interactions.

4) Only 50.4% of the Title VII teachers report that they are "now proficient in both Spanish and English."

5) The fact that 49.6% of the teachers implementing the bilingual program which is being evaluated admit to not being proficient in the language raises serious questions concerning the validity of the findings.

6) It is difficult to understand how these findings with questionable validity can be reported. As yet, there is no significance given to what can be considered a much more important finding, namely, that 49.6%, or one-half of the bilingual education teachers studied admit to not being proficient in the language.

7) It is doubtful that AIR would give any weight to a study of the impact of a traditional English language program if they were to find that one-half of the teachers did not speak English.

VII. COSTING OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

A. AIR STUDY ELEMENT: To obtain per pupil costs associated with Title VII and non-Title VII students, AIR staff interviewed "cognizant local personnel." To derive per pupil cost, AIR separated funding into four categories:

(1) Title VII funds,

(2) other bilingual funds,

(3) other additional funds for the school, and

(4) basic district funds.

B. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES:

1) Specific cost records were not examined by AIR staff. Cost findings thus become questionable. The critical issue is whether any conclusions can be drawn from subjective answers given by "cognizant local personnel," which AIR fails to identify.

2) In lumping items (1) and (2) above, AIR seem to deviate from the study's original intent which is to evaluate the impact of the Title VII program. To combine funding from other bilingual funds and assume that all those funds are going into Title VII programs is inaccurate.

3) In as much as AIR states that other additional funds (item 3) are not associated with bilingual education, these costs should not be added to the

cost of bilingual education.

4) The only true cost figure for Title VII is the average cost ($310) derived from the total Title VII cost divided by the number of students served. However, even this average cost is simplistic. For example, AIR makes no distinction between the cost of teacher training (and other personnel), which is the costliest item, and the cost of materials used by students, which is the least costly.

5) AIR makes no costing distinction in another essential area: the comparison between the more expensive start-up cost and the lesser cost of an ongoing program at particular grade levels.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The AIR Preliminary Report makes determinations on the impact of Title VII Bilingual Education programs funded by the U.S. Office of Education. It is the opinion of IDRA that inadequacies in methodology, sampling, instrumentation, controls, and implementation make the AIR findings highly questionable.

It is unfortuante and perhaps irresponsible for such findings of questionable validity to be released and given such wide dissemination in the media just prior to the congressional deliberations on the refunding of the Bilingual Education Act.

The information gathered by AIR is not entirely useless. It is obvious that there are problems and discrepancies in the implementation of bilingual education programs. The U.S. Office of Education (and the National Institute of Education) should diligently pursue further analysis into these problems and channel federal resources toward their solution, rather than promoting inaccurate judgements on the value of this instructional alternative.